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ABSTRACT

This report identifies problems and recommends solutions related to the education of black children in American. Following an introduction which describes the method and content of the report, the relevant issues are outlined, organized into four major categories: (1) goals and objectives of education; (2) roles and responsibilities; (3) curriculum content, school/classroom climate, and teaching; and (4) the role of the family. Next, recommendations are presented, in two groups. The first group concerns teachers and administrators; among points made here are that (1) school policies should reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the larger society; (2) the history and culture of minority groups should be part of the regular curriculum; and (3) success in increasing student achievement should be the criterion for evaluating and rewarding teachers. The second group of recommendations is directed to concerned persons outside the school systems. Such persons are advised to: (1) monitor everything relating to education and blacks; (2) conduct relevant research; (3) communicate research results, policy issues, and other useful information throughout the community, particularly among parents; (4) advocate for policies and programs that address the educational needs of black children; and (5) act, individually and collectively, on policies and programs that benefit black children. Appended are lists of publications used in creating the report; individuals who contributed; on-going programs that provided materials; and organizations that have held meetings on the topic. A description of the process of generating the report is also appended. (KH)

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The Education of Black Children in America: Critical Issues and Recommendations

A Study Conducted in Response to a Request from the
Organizing Committee of the
National Conference on Educating Black Children

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June 1986

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PREFACE

This report identifies many of the problems and proposed solutions to the quest for educational equity in America. The perspective is that of an advocate for the well-being of Black children. The basis for this report is a portion of the many projects, books, journal articles, conference papers, debates, speeches, and newspaper articles that have addressed this issue during the past few years.

Our assumption in writing this report is that the primary audience will be a group of educators, researchers, administrators and advocates who know far more about aspects of these issues than we do. Our purpose is to present an overview that may facilitate further discussion and action that will result in a better quality of education for all Black children in America.

Many of the organizations and individuals most active in educational research and program development responded to the urgent request with information and numerous references. We strongly encourage the reading of the reports cited in the appendices and their even more extensive bibliographies. The literature is rich with eloquently articulated descriptions of the complex issues which we merely list.

This report reflects only a portion of the enthusiastic and thoughtful activity, study and concern throughout the country. There are many groups not represented in this study, simply because in the time available we did not make contact with them or obtain their reports. Important among such exclusions are the American Muslim Mission, and the university-based precollege programs designed to increase the participation of minorities in mathematics and science.

This research has extended our knowledge, and more importantly, it has enabled and stimulated us to become more effective in addressing some of the issues discussed. We hope that the report will serve your purpose, and make a contribution to the work that must be done to achieve educational equity in America.

Vijaya L. Melnick and Paula Quick Hall

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INTRODUCTION

This report identifies many of the issues and proposed solutions to problems related to the education of Black children in America. The volume of research, number of conferences, experts and advocates on this subject is tremendous. The abundance of factors, considerations, and concerns expressed in the materials we reviewed reflects the massive dimensions of the problem. The complexity of the subject defies simplification.

This is literally a report of what others have articulated as the critical issues that affect the quality of education for Black children. The scope is broad, and includes issues of access, achievement, assessment, and the affective domain. The roles and relationships among students, teachers, counselors, parents, and other community members are considered. Appropriate uses of technology, funding, and testing are targets of continuing debate.

The focus is on conference reports or books that reflect perspectives of organizations or the results of research or program evaluations. Emphasis is given to the views of predominantly Black organizations.

During the past several years, there has been a surge of attention given to the quality of education in America. Although most of the reports that have been issued mention

race as an issue or factor in relation to academic performance, Black children are not a major focus. Such reports are not discussed in this paper. They are critiqued with regard to implications for Black children in several publications, including "The National Urban League Education Statement - May 17, 1984: Thirty Years After Brown."

The two major categories of information in this report are 1) specific issues clearly identified and discussed in at least one report, and 2) specific recommendations for improving the education of Black children in America. The sources of this content include 1) publications directly relevant to this subject; 2) reports of conferences with kindergarten through twelfth grade education of Black children as the primary focus; 3) reports from organizations that have included education issues among other topics at a conference; and 4) evaluated extracurricular programs that address educational needs of Black children.

The recommendations are derived from explicit statements or are inferred from program descriptions. It has been our observation that many action-oriented groups bypass the "formal research and recommendations" phase (using evidence provided by experience and others' research) and go directly to program development. In instances where such programs have been or are being evaluated and studied, they are included in this report.

Finally, we have appended lists of 1) publications that provided the substance for this report; 2) individuals who responded to our inquiry, or for whom the subject of this report has been a major focus of attention; 3) on-going programs that provided descriptions, evaluations or other materials relevant to the study; and 4) organizations that have held meetings on the topic. A description of our process in generating this report is also appended.

I. Goals and Objectives of education are an issue sometimes taken for granted. Based on the reports we examined, unarticulated disagreement as to the goals and objectives for Black students may be a critical issue. According to the National Alliance of Black School Educators, Inc., educational content should be "true, appropriate and relevant." Processes must be "democratic and humane." The desired outcome is "the complete development of the person, and not merely preparation for the available low-level jobs, or even for high-level jobs, that may serve no purpose beyond individual enhancement."

The National Urban League (NUL) firmly advocates a goal of "equitable educational results" for children of all racial and ethnic groups. NUL further urges efforts to "increase the pool of Black ... students who are able to persist successfully through the math/science educational pipeline to postsecondary and advanced degree programs."

II. Roles and Responsibilities are discussed, especially in terms of accountability and consequences. For example, most reports are critical of the fact that Black students are penalized for the failures of school, teachers, government agencies and others to provide them

with adequate quality public education.

A. There seems to be some consensus on the appropriate roles of the federal government:

1. to guarantee equity;
2. to protect constitutional and civil rights;
3. to fund research;
4. to fund teacher training; and
5. to fund programs for student populations with special educational needs.

The issues of debate center around,

1. levels of funding (e.g., cuts in compensatory education);
2. reluctance (or refusal) to enforce and support civil rights;
3. advocacy for tuition tax credits or vouchers for private school attendance; and
4. the devising of mechanisms for funding that give state and local governments broad discretionary power in the use of federal funds.

According to several sources, notably the Children's Defense Fund and the National Black Child Development Institute, reductions in funding of critical programs jeopardize the status of the Black children, who are at greatest risk.

B. The most critical issues with regard to state and local governments seem to be,

1. the institution of new requirements and competency testing for teacher certification;
2. the institution of competency tests for high school graduation and/or different diplomas for students based on their scores on such tests;
3. the distribution of funds and material resources (especially computers and software) among school districts and schools with varying levels of need;
4. the representation of Black adults on policy-making and advisory bodies that determine rules and procedures for schools;
5. the regulation of teacher-training programs (content requirements, use of tests, certification of state school graduates, etc.);
6. the numbers of teachers and school administrative personnel trained, especially in academic areas such as mathematics, computer science and other fields where shortages exist;
7. the racial mix of teachers, counselors and administrators in schools, especially those which have predominately Black student enrollments; and
8. the principle for allocation of funds: equality versus equity.

A major concern is that impact assessments are seldom

conducted prior to implementation of policy changes. This problem is made worse by the failure to collect and/or make available to the public data that would allow monitoring of the outcomes for students by sex within racial/ethnic groups.

C. Teacher-training institutions are responsible for

1. the lack of congruence between their curricula and the competency tests;
2. too little emphasis on mastery of academic areas as opposed to pedagogy;
3. too little attention to content related to the learning environment and classroom climate; and
4. failure to include multi-ethnic/cultural content in courses, and other information and activities that would mitigate against racism as manifested in teacher expectations and classroom behavior of teachers.

Of major concern is the predicted decline in the number of Black teachers, and their numbers relative to the increasing proportion of Black students.

D. Schools and school boards are held responsible for policies that threaten to or already adversely impact on Black students. Of special concern is the humiliating and discouraging effect of test failure on students and their families. Many studies observe or predict that the implementation of such

policies will exacerbate the already critical problem of high school attrition. Most issues are in some way related to testing:

1. tracking of students into academic, vocational and "general" programs, from which there is typically little mobility;
2. the misuse of tests to assign students to tracks or "ability" groups, when the subsequent placement has not been shown to benefit the student or to facilitate academic achievement;
3. the use of tests as a barrier to entry into specialized public schools or programs;
4. the implementation of graduation standards and competency tests for students in instances where
   a. there is no phase-in period;
   b. there is no documented correlation between prerequisite course content and test content;
   c. there is a lack of congruence between instructional and testing processes;
   d. there are unresolved questions as to validity; and
   e. there is probable bias in cultural content and context.
5. career counseling that reflects race bias and/or is based solely on test performance;
6. failure to follow due process in the formulation and implementation of new rules and procedures;

7. an inadequate number of counselors, and the reluctance of counselors to refer serious problems; and
8. biased application of disciplinary sanctions.

III. Curriculum Content, School/Classroom Climate and Teaching issues are numerous. Among them are

A. the inclusion/exclusion of African American history and culture in appropriate places in the regular school curriculum;

B. the use of computers for teaching programming, versus drill and practice;

C. access to and differences in the use of computers for various categories of students;

D. inadequate attention to development of higher-level cognitive skills--reasoning, analyzing and synthesizing information and drawing inferences from text;

E. a narrowing of curricula to prepare students for tests;

F. the failure of remedial programs to apply the results of pedagogical research or experience;

G. the preponderance of courses that teach "bits of information" as opposed to those that would teach cognitive skills; and

H. the link between school systems and unions and the consequences for apprenticeships, internships, and career education.

IV. The Role of the Family is discussed in several studies. There is agreement that parent involvement is desirable. Studies by Reginald Clark and others identify important family characteristics and behaviors that contribute to high-academic achievement by "poor" black children. The research on "effective schools" demonstrates, however, that regardless of family circumstances there are school characteristics that facilitate academic achievement for Black children. Our focus is on those issues that are accessible to organizations outside the family, such as

A. the extent to which Black parents are encouraged to be active in schools, especially those with predominately White enrollments;

B. the ability of some parents to monitor and insist on proper treatment for their children;

C. out-of-school access to microcomputer and educational enrichment;

D. conflicts between school standards and culture and those of families; and

E. the tendency of poor schools and teachers to abdicate their responsibility based on the excuse that the family is disadvantaged and therefore not providing necessary support.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations concern teachers and school administrators:

1. The staffing of schools and policy-making bodies should reflect the diversity of racial and ethnic groups in our society;
2. The history and culture of minority groups should be a part of the regular curriculum and content of school materials and programs;
3. Teachers should have and express equally high expectations for the academic performance of all students, regardless of race;
4. Teacher education programs (pre-service and in-service) should address problems of racism and ignorance of culturally different practices;
5. The teaching in public schools should reflect the best knowledge of effective methods and the most appropriate uses of educational technology;
6. An adequate number of counselors, available to students for curriculum and career planning, personal counseling or referral for serious problems;
7. Teachers should be helped to meet the higher standards imposed by competency testing; and
8. Teachers should be evaluated and rewarded based on their success in increasing student achievement.

The recommendations to those outside school systems might be summarized as Monitor, Research, Communicate, Advocate and Act. Specific recommendations include the following:

1. Monitor everything, especially
   a. legislation and funding of education programs;
   b. policy changes and their outcomes, especially differential effects on Black students;
   c. data collection and reporting methods;
   d. personnel patterns in schools and administrative offices;
   e. the extent to which schools are teaching the content of tests, especially competency tests for diplomas;
   f. tracking determined by test results, for entry into schools as well as into programs within a school;
   g. the progress of students placed in special education programs (and insist on regular reports on their treatment);
   h. the allocation of funds among predominately Black and White schools, particularly those funds earmarked for vocational education;
   i. the selection of schools for "school improvement" initiatives;
   j. classroom behavior of teachers, for evidence of subtle forms of discrimination, such as not calling on Black students as often as others;
   k. the uses of educational technology to be sure that

computers are not being used for purposes that would be better accomplished by people, and that they are being used to help students develop higher-level cognitive skills;

l. anything for which racially differentiated patterns of participation or achievement are evident (e.g., discipline, course-taking, test scores, club membership, graduation, apprenticeships, awards, etc.).

2. Conduct research on questions that have potential importance in the education of Black children, especially if other researchers ignore them.

a. Study successful models

(1) of effective schools;

(2) of methods of teaching cognitive skills;

(3) of vocational programs, such as Job Corps, and Upward Bound;

(4) of out-of-school intervention or enrichment programs (such as those cited in Equity and Excellence: Compatible Goals by Shirley M. Malcom); and

(5) of ways to influence teacher attitudes toward higher expectations for the capabilities of Black students.

b. Support research on

(1) costs to society of school drop-outs (for advocacy of education funding);

(2) ways of distributing resources to promote equity in schools;

(3) validity of standardized testing instruments;

(4) class-based differences in school performance, to see which factors that we identify as race-related are actually a function of economic and/or social class. (This issue is well articulated by Ronald R. Edmonds in "How Can We Advocate For Effective Schools?" in Excellence and Equity, Quality and Inequality.); and

(5) ways to motivate students and influence their perceptions of the rewards of academic achievement;

There is, in some reports, a call for the training of more Black researchers, particularly psychometricians, and for more education research at Black colleges and universities, and generally, greater involvement and representation of Black scholars in the education research community.

3. Communicate research results, policy issues and other useful information throughout the community, particularly among parents about

a. their desires and expectations for their children;

b. tests and the interpretation of scores;

c. the need for their involvement in the education of their children at school and at home;

d. legal rights and responsibilities;

e. parental roles in creating a home climate conducive to academic achievement and learning - the importance of behavior standards, rituals, and relationships;

f. models of success -- case studies (e.g., Faustine Childress Jones' study of Dunbar school in Little Rock, Reginald Clark's study of "literacy producing actions" in poor Black families, and James Comer's work at the Yale Child Study Center), as well as biographies of individuals.

4. Advocate for policies and programs that address the educational needs of Black children, in particular

a. allocation of resources in a manner that will achieve equity of educational results;

b. desegregation, along with the pursuit of other remedies where desegregation is not technically feasible, especially financing to ensure equity in predominately one-race schools;

c. the teaching of test-taking skills, problem solving, computer literacy, and higher-order cognitive skills;

d. greater participation by Black students in available enrichment programs;

e. multi-ethnic teacher training programs that include such elements as anthropology courses, student teaching in mixed or different race

classes, and attention to cultural aspects of the learning environment;

f. the use of tests to measure growth rather than rank;

g. the use of flexible, short-term, task-specific, pull-out programs or groups to meet special needs of students, with most of their schooling done in non-tracked, heterogeneous classes;

h. academic competition among students with activities and rewards to promote such;

i. the inclusion of life-planning and decision-making courses;

j. adequate funding of compensatory education programs, so that the adoption of tougher standards does not increase drop-out and teen pregnancy rates;

k. a cultural-linguistic approach to teaching language development (as applied by the Northeastern Illinois University, Center for Inner-City Studies); and

l. student impact assessments before changes in policy and/or programs.

5. Act, individually and collectively, as participants, supporters, catalysts and/or initiators of policies and programs that benefit Black children.

a. Become involved in program planning, through parent-school-community organizations.

b. Serve as role models for students, and give them opportunites to observe in work settings and discuss career matters.

c. Provide after-school group study centers.

d. Provide a cadre of "advocates" who can accompany parents to school conferences and help them to understand and communicate with school personnel, where such is needed.

e. Critique tests.

f. Keep the community informed of legal rights, problems, effective programs, and issues.

g. Encourage and initiate involvement by community organizations and businesses to

   (1) provide jobs for youth; and

   (2) "ensure that the content of vocational and career education courses reflects the requirements of the marketplace." (NUL)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX B: LIST OF ON-GOING PROGRAMS

A Better Chance, Inc. The A Better Chance, Inc. / Ford Foundation Minority Careers Choice Study: Not A Mind. Not A Moment To Lose. Boston: A Better Chance, Inc., March, 1984. (National in scope, ABC identifies exceptional minority students and refers them to independent schools that have rigorous academic environments.)

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Jefferson, Francine E. and Omar K. Moore. An Evaluation of The Jack and Jill of America Foundation's National Project in Ohio. Houston: The Responsive Environments Foundation, Inc., 1986. (This program works with gifted high school students in Saturday and summer classes in science, mathematics, and test-taking skills. Its intent is to strengthen the test-taking skills and "science background of the students so that they will be motivated to pursue careers in the sciences.")

Linkages. Office of Opportunities in Science. Linkages. Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1986. (A program designed to bring together the resources of community organizations,

and the science community to improve the science education of girls, minorities, and students with disabilities.

National Assault on Illiteracy Program. Walters, William. National Assault On Illiteracy Program. New York: Community Motivators, Inc. (This initiative involves a network of national organizations with on-going programs, now combining their efforts to eradicate illiteracy in America. This is being done through community-building programs financed by local businesses and industries.

NAPD. National Association of Precollege Directors. Promoting Success Through Collaborative Ventures in Precollege Science and Mathematics. New York: National Association of Precollege Directors, 1985. (A coalition of nineteen precollege program directors with programs designed to increase the number of minority students pursuing an engineering and math based college curriculum.)

PRISM. Program for Rochester to Interest Students in Science and Math. Rochester, New York: The Industrial Management Council. (This program, supported largely by local industries, provides academic enrichment and career education to students in a variety of activities.)

Say Yes to a Youngster's Future. National Urban Coalition. Equal Access to Science, Mathematics, and Technology: Say Yes to a Youngster's Future. Washington, D.C.: National Urban Coalition. (A program designed to involve parent and community groups in providing positive learning environments for Black and Hispanic preschool and elementary school children to improve the quality of their experiences in science, mathematics, and computer activities.)

Twelve Together. Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation. 12 Together: Group Advisors' Guide to Twelve Together. Detroit: Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation.
CRW Associates, Inc. Final Third Year Evaluation Report on Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation Twelve Together Program. Detroit: CRW Associates, Inc., November, 1985. (Through positive peer pressure in weekly counseling sessions--12 students per group--MDYF aims to help students complete high school. Students from the entire program attend a retreat; they have small group study sessions to set educational goals and to increase their chances of meeting them.)

APPENDIX C: MAJOR CONFERENCES HELD WITHIN THE LAST THREE YEARS ON BLACK EDUCATION

Alabama Center for Higher Education, Center for Improvement of Instruction and Learning, "The Testing Issue," Montgomery, Alabama, April 12-13, 1984.

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Jack and Jill of America: Los Angeles Chapter's Fourth Annual Parenting Workshop," June 30, 1984.

Johnson Foundation: "The Education of Black Americans - A Wingspread Conference," Racine, Wisconsin, May 28-30, 1986.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: "Education Summit," Fisk University, Nashville, 1983.

National Council of Negro Women: "Education Commission," Washington, D.C., February 14, 1986.

National Urban League: "A Black Perspective on Educational Reform," July 30, 1984.

APPENDIX D: ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE HELD SESSIONS ON EDUCATION AT MAJOR CONVENTIONS

The Alpha Kappa Alpha National Sorority

American Anthropological Association

American Educational Research Association

American Association for Counseling & Development

American Sociological Association

Association of School Business Officials

Civil Rights Institute of the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund

Comparative and International Education Society

Conference of the New York Alliance of Black School Educators

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (Legislative Weekend)

Council for Exceptional Children

Delta Sigma Theta National Sorority

Eastern Psychological Association

Institute for the Study of Afro-American Life and History

Johnson Foundation Wingspread Conference Center

Linguistic Society of America

National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials

National Black Child Development Institute

National Council for Black Studies

National Council on Measurement in Education

National Council of Teachers of English

National Technical Association

Prince George's County Convention of Black People

Southern Association for Institutional Research

APPENDIX E: METHODOLOGY

Our task was defined as follows:

1. to identify conferences held within the past three years that considered, as a main part of their agenda, education of Black children in America in kindergarten through grade 12;

2. to identify studies done on the topic during the same period;

3. to look specifically at what had been done by Black organizations;

4. to look at what any organization or researcher had done on the topic within the time period;

5. to prepare a summary of issues and recommendations based on the content of existing conference reports and studies; 6. to list the conferences and their sponsors, and the publications discovered in the study.

The process we followed was to

1. compile a list of the Black organizations that would be our primary focus of inquiry;

2. send a letter requesting information to each organization's national and local offices, where possible;

3. make follow-up calls to the organizations most likely to have produced relevant reports, or conducted conferences;

4. conduct literature searches for published materials;

5. examine the materials received; and

6. write a summary of findings.

In a period of approximately six weeks, we wrote to 226 organizations; 57 received personalized letters. We conducted literature searches of 7 Black newspapers, which revealed more than 52 citations; and the ERIC database, which yielded 79 relevant references. We made telephone calls to approximately 110 organizations to which letters had been sent or to whom we had been referred by respondents. We received 39 letters in response to our inquiries, some with reports, project descriptions, publications or other relevant materials.

The publications, conferences, projects and organizations relevant to the study are listed in appendices A through D.